

Colouring lives

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PHOTOGRAPHY TONY TERVOERT

Starting out on the cobblestoned streets of the walled city of Chester on the North Wales border, making posies for royalty, it is no surprise that the dancing, designing fingers of florist Avril Hallows are among the most sought after in Australia.

But how did her life of flowers start and what brought this English (or Welsh) rose from the rolling green meadows of the Mother Country, to the vineyard-striped hills of Angaston?

"My Dad was a construction worker but he loved to garden as his relaxation," says Avril. "I used to watch him out in our old greenhouse peacefully growing vegetables and flowers from seed. I suppose that's where my love of flowers came from—although I'm a hopeless gardener."





After finishing school at 16, Avril started working four days a week at Aldersey Hall Florists in Chester while studying floristry at the Cheshire School of Agriculture.

“It was like an apprenticeship I suppose. The Cheshire School of Agriculture was absolutely beautiful, right on a canal with flourishing gardens and green lawns all around,” she says. “Aldersey Hall was a pretty little florist shop. It was an old terrace Tudor store sitting on a cobblestoned street. And yes I can still remember the bright yellow roses I used when I made a posy for the Queen.”

Avril says that while there are certain classical motifs and designs, every florist likes to express their own unique personality in the way they build a bouquet.

“I was very influenced by an Indian woman I worked with at Aldersey Hall,” she says. “She showed me how to experiment with different colour palettes and my creative use of colour has since become my signature.”

Taking a right hand turn, Avril decided in her early 20s to experiment with other work, leaving the florist’s bench for the hospitality industry. Not only did the year off reaffirm her interest in floristry, she got more than she bargained for—an Australian husband.

“I met Craig working in a bar and by

the age of 21 I’d moved to Adelaide—much to my parents’ disgust. They were horrified when I told them I was moving to the other side of the world. In fact they still haven’t really forgiven me.”

In a new country and without a job, Avril immediately returned to what she knew best, gaining a position at one of the city’s finest florists, Tynte Street Flowers in North Adelaide.

“Flowers always have a way of calling me back, they just bring so much joy,” she laughs. “I was at Tynte Street for eight years and I loved it. But then Craig got a job in Angaston so we moved to the Barossa and I started working for Viva.”

Established and owned by another Tynte Street florist, Tess Cutajar, in 2002 Avril became part-owner of the business and moved the store from Nuriootpa to its current Angaston shop front before taking full ownership of Viva just two years later.

The savvy business decision coincided with a growing awareness of the Barossa as a major South Australian wedding destination and Viva entered a new era.

“There had always been plenty of local weddings,” Avril explains. “But because of the historic buildings, beautiful countryside, the accommodation, the wine and the modern function facilities it became more popular with Adelaide and interstate couples.

“All of a sudden we were doing three

or four weddings a weekend and were run off our feet. I’ve now created flower designs for people from all over Australia and many parts of the world, just from my little shop in Angaston. That’s the international influence of the Barossa.”

While business has flourished, prompting a raft of recent renovations, including a sumptuous bridal consultation area, Avril admits she’s found it hard to acclimatise to the unpredictability of country trading.

“After working at Tynte Street for eight years, it took me a while to get my head around the lack of impulse buying and foot traffic in the Barossa, particularly during this last long winter,” she says.

“Lots of locals still see flowers as a luxury item and can’t buy themselves flowers without feeling guilty. That just shouldn’t be the case—a beautiful bunch of flowers brightens up your day and brings so much joy.

“Saying that, I get fabulous trade from wineries and businesses and there are many families who are just wonderful supporters. It becomes a very personal thing. One family here in Angaston had me do the floral arrangements for both of their daughters’ weddings. Now whenever I see them in the street they’ll all give me a big hug—I like that sense of being a part of a community, of adding colour to people’s lives.”